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ABSTRACT

Despite a professional commitment to "teach ethics," speech communication literature and textbooks contain almost no advice or help on how to accomplish this task. An integrated teaching approach, however, can involve students more directly in the ethical issues that may arise in a persuasion course. The first element in increasing student awareness of ethics is emphasis on ethics as a serious matter in the course. The second element requires each student to write two or three sentences on what they consider to be the "general ethical problem or issue" in persuasion, then share their statements with others in the class and comment on them. This discussion of the various individual positions leads to the third element, the assignment of materials on ethics in the course textbook. The next formal element that focuses on ethics develops from two speech assignments: one that requires the students to use the ethical statement they wrote earlier as a guideline for a persuasive speech, and a second that requires them to meet the ethical standard established by the teacher. The last element of the course is the term paper. Students are required, based on course experience and readings, to rewrite their personal ethical standard prepared at the beginning of the class and to evaluate the ethics of the persuasive event they analyze using that standard. By including a statement of ethics as a course objective, the students and teacher are reminded, from the beginning, that ethics is a matter of serious concern in persuasion. (HOD)

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Ethics in Persuasion: An Integrated Teaching Approach for Increasing Student Awareness of Ethical Issues in Persuasion

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"The distrust of persuasive methods in speech has been perennial. Artifice, sophistry, exploitation, demagoguery--these and similar approbrious epithets have been freely hurled in condemnation of appeals to the emotions. In an age of high pressure salesmanship, questionable advertizing, commercialized evangelism, and emotional jury appeals, the interest in the chronic problem of the ethics of persuasion is again as acute as ever. In view of a renewed current interest, it may be interesting and worthwhile at this time to re-state our position as teachers of speech."[1]

These words of Professor William Schrier, of the University of North Dakota, appeared in a 1930 Quarterly Journal of Speech article; it was the first article in that journal to use the words ethics or ethical in the title. If the direct use of those words is a rough measure[2] of interest in ethical issues in communication. we need to question the accuracy of Professor Schrier's judgment as to "renewed interest." After all he was writing fifteen years after the first issue of that journal, five years after that "significant" article, "The Place of Jujitsu in Public Speaking" had been published and it would be twenty-five years before another article would appear in one of our three national journals with "ethical" in the title.[3]

There have been, in all, thirty-two such articles with ethics or ethical in the titles of our three national and four regional journals.

1930-1	1960-1	1968-2
1952-1	1961-1	1969-2
1955-2	1963-1	1970-1
1957-4	1964-2	1972-1
1958-1	1966-3	1973-2
1959-3	1967-1	1978-2
		1980-1

While this tabulating process does not support Professor Schrier it does support the 1959 article of J. Vernon Jensen. Professor Jensen,

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[1]"The Ethics of Persuasion," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 16 (November 1930), p. 476.

[2]My rough measure involved listing all articles in Quarterly Journal of Speech, Speech Monographs, Speech Teacher, Southern Speech, Western Speech, Central States Speech, and Today's Speech which contained the words ethics or ethical in the title.

[3]Karl R. Wallace, "An Ethical Basis of Communication," The Speech Teacher, 4 (January 1955), pp. 1-9.

whose excellent bibliography is still of considerable value, analyzed the literature on ethics in public address which had been written in the previous five years.[4] He concluded that our field, in general, had committed itself to the idea of teaching about ethics and in arriving at that conclusion he draws a significant distinction by noting that the literature he examined "discusses predominantly only the general aims of speech education rather than specific methods of achieving those aims."[5]

Eleven years later, Robert C. Johnson, noted this distinction of Jensen and wondered if the sentiment to do more in the classroom with the teaching of ethics had occurred; "in practice are teachers in contemporary classes in public address leading their students to consider the ethical moral questions in the art of public speaking?"[6]

To answer that question Johnson surveyed speech teachers in California State Colleges and the University of California during the fall of 1968. His conclusions are based on fifty-five completed questionnaires with forty-four being teachers who usually taught a beginning course and thirty-two listing public address as their area of special interest. His results are varied but seem best expressed as:

> ". . . these findings indicate that most speech teachers feel they have a responsibility to discuss with their students the ethical implications of public speaking. However, less than one third of the instructors surveyed . . . deal with the subject directly as a specific unit of speech instruction."[7]

This conclusion of Johnson, my own examination of literature on ethics and persuasion before and after 1970, and my examination of four major textbooks[8] in persuasion leads me to the major assertion of this paper. It is; despite a professional committment to "teach ethics," our literature and textbooks contain almost no advice or help on how to directly accomplish this task. The rest of this paper is thus devoted to discussing an integrated teaching approach for involving students more directly in the ethical issues that can arise in a persuasion course.

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[4]"An Analysis of Recent Literature on Teaching Ethics in Public Address," Speech Teacher, 8 (September 1959) 219-228.

[5]Jensen, 219.

[6]"Teaching Speech Ethics in the Beginning Speech Course," Speech Teacher, 29 (January 1970) 58-61.

[7]Johnson, 60.

[8]The textbooks examined were Kenneth E. Anderson, Persuasion (Boston Allyn, and Bacon, Inc. 1978), Winston L. Brembeck and William S. Howell, Persuasion: A Means of Social Influence (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall 1976), Charles U. Larson, Persuasion: Reception and Responsibility (Balmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Co.) and Herbert W. Simons, Persuasion: Understanding, Practice and Analysis (Reading, Massachusettes: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co.)

Before discussing this integrated and direct approach, let me deal with three introductory issues. The first is raised in the Johnson article. In puzzling over the discrepency in his findings between instructor feelings of responsibility for teaching ethics and the limited number who did so, Johnson wondered if "this may indicate that most instructors believe the best way to confront students . . . is by the indirect method of raising ethical questions during the discussion of other materials."[9] There appears to be no way at this point to answer that question with appropriate empirical data. My own thirty years in the classroom makes me believe that few things are successfully taught indirectly, and that indirect is usually not a chosen methodology but the result of an inability to produce meaningful and direct teaching methods. Some evidence from the area of persuasion may have application to this question. Despite impressive theoretical arguments in favor of implicit approaches in stating ones persuasion goal the predominance of experimental evidence appears to favor explicit approaches.[10] I suspect the same is true concerning the issue of direct versus indirect teaching of ethics.

The second issue is the matter of a teacher "imposing" his/her own moral standards on their students. Much depends on how we define the word impose but I will argue here that it is appropriate for the instructor in a persuasion class to set up their own standard of ethics, to explain it to the class and to actually use it for all or some of the course. I would draw my line when and if this instructor claims their ethical standard is the only standard, that there can be no questions raised, that no modifications are possible, that all students must use the instructor's standard at all points in this class and in the future.

The third issue is whether the approach which follows is completely "required" or distinctive. The answer is "NO." What follows is an example of an approach which appears to work in getting students to directly confront some of the ethical issues in a persuasion course. I offer these approaches to stimulate you to produce your own integrative methods for involving students.

The first element in my Theories of Persuasion course that relates to increasing student awareness of ethics is that this matter has become a major objective for the course. As a result my four objectives for the course read as follows:

1. This course will examine various theories that should be useful in understanding what occurs in a persuasion interaction.

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[9]Johnson, 60.

[10]For example see C.I. Houland and W. Mandell, "An Experimental Comparison of Conclusion Drawing by the Communicator and the Audience," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology 47, (1952) 581-588, J.V. Irwin and H.H. Brockhus, "The 'teletalk' project: A study of the effectiveness of two public relation speeches," Speech Monograph 30 (1963) 359-368, and W. Weiss and S. Steinbark, "The Influence on Communication Effectiveness of Explicitly Urging Action and Policy Consequences," Journal of Experimental Social Psychology 1 (1965) 396-406.

2. This course attempts to help you develop skills for protecting yourself in a persuasive world.
3. This course attempts to help you develop skills in public speaking that is persuasive in purpose.
4. This course will raise questions about the ethics of persuasion and will require each of you to develop a written ethical position for your present persuasive efforts.

Including a statement on ethics in the course objectives remind me, and the students, from the first meeting, that ethics is a matter of serious concern in this course.

The next element occurs early in the quarter, usually during the second week. At that point I go through a three step process. First, before text material on ethics has been assigned I use part of a period to have each student write in two or three sentences what they consider to be the "general ethical problem or general ethical issue" in persuasion. These are collected and passed around the room so each student has one to read that is not her/his own. Students are then asked to read the statement they received and to comment on it.

This assignment which takes fifteen to thirty minutes may puzzle some of you because it seems like doing the obvious. In trying it you may discover that what is obvious to speech communication teachers is not always so obvious to speech communication students. In my experience there will only be a few useable answers such as the ethical problem is "How honest can you be and still persuade," "Can you do or say anything in attempting persuading," "Is it o.k. to cheat and lie to convince people" and the two which I most appreciate, "How far can I go in getting people to agree with me without hating myself," and "What limits, it any, are imposed on a persuader in her effort to successful produce attitudes and behavior change?"

This assignment stimulates discussion and leads naturally to the second step which requires the student to use time outside of class to write out as precise a statement as possible of their present ethical standard ("answer the question, what limits, if any, would you at the present time impose on your efforts to use human communication to influence others by modifying their beliefs, values or attitudes").[10]

The students bring their efforts to class on the following period and a system is established so that each student reads and writes a reaction to as many papers as possible within a twenty minute period. The rest of the period is spent in discussion. This step stimulates interest in ethics, serves as an introduction to the textbook reading and especially illus-

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[10]The last part of this statement is a slight modification of the definition of persuasion found in the textbook I am using that term; in this case Simons, page 21.

[11]On this assignment, the previous one and ones like it I use a code number system instead of names. I feel the anonymity produces more directness.

trate the diverse ethical positions which exist in this supposedly homogeneous group of 18-25 year old college students. As an example, consider these quite different positions articulated in my summer 1981 course:

- "I would only use logic, truth, and facts. I would never lie, distort or mis-lead my audience in any way. I would do this to others because it is what I would want others to do to me. The Golden Rule still is the best ethical standard that ever existed or will exist."

- "I wouldn't lie outright but I would withhold information and give information only favorable to my side. I would use mis-leading information if necessary to get the job done if I wouldn't get caught and my proposed action would not harm the individual to be persuaded."

- "If I truly believed what I am trying to persuade on is good for the audience there are no limits. I would go to any length to persuade on something I feel strongly about. To impose limits on yourself is to be a fool in a dog eat dog world. The name of the game is winning. My ethical standard is to do what you have to do to win."

This discussion of the various individual positions leads naturally to step three, the assignment of materials on ethics in the course textbook. In addition to the class discussion which emulates from text material, I distribute toward the end of that discussion a copy of my ethical standard.[12] Since a first premise in my system asserts the position that "An ethical advocate is obligated to reject propositions which, when tested by his best thinking, prove to have a low truth - probability,"[13] a question to provoke further discussion at this point is to inquire which students presently hold jobs or are preparing for jobs which would be eliminated if this ethical position was taken seriously. In a course filled with speech communication majors, marketing majors, mass communication-advertising majors, etc., there is no problem in getting a response.

The next formal element that focuses on ethics in this course develops from the two speech assignments in the course. On the first speech assignment the students are told to use the ethical statement they wrote early in the course as a guideline. With any kind of luck you will have at least one student who is a natural or trained "Con Artist" and one who has imposed no limits on his ethical approach. My latest experience was a college senior, returning to school after two years of direct sales experience. His "pitch" for a one year photographic contract was a thing of beauty and resulted in six persons signing up for a personal interview

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[12]My position is a slightly re-worded version of the standard proposed in Wayne C. Minnick, The Art of Persuasion, 1968 (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company) Chapter 11.

[13]Minnick, 286.

visit with him outside of class. He then dramatically returned to the front, ripped up the personal contract slips and went back over his speech explaining the deceptions, mis-information and appeals.

On the second speech assignment, I require that students meet my ethical standard. Here too you will probably be fortunate enough to have at least one student with a topic or approach that does not seem to meet that standard and can produce a teaching "crisis." The typical crisis for me is "truth probability." I individually and rather quickly dispatch the student who wants to speak on "Smoking is Good for You" but I have more difficulty with a proposed topic such as "Eliminating Present Gun Control Regulations." The last time this topic arose I presented it to the class as a project. We all went to the library to dig out everything we could find on gun control, we met to present and discuss what was found and then took a secret ballot vote on the degree of truth probability in eliminating gun control.[14]

The last element in my integrated ethical assignments involves the term paper. The standard assignment of "evaluating a persuasive event in terms of textbook theory" is modified to include one additional step. Students are required, based on course experiences and reading, to rewrite their personal ethical standard prepared at the beginning of the class and to evaluate the ethics of persuasive event they analyze using that standard.

In summary, this paper has used personal experience and literature review in an attempt to make these points.

1. The conflict in our field which seems to have existed at one time over the need or desirability of raising ethical questions about the use of persuasion (communication) has been resolved in favor of doing so.

2. The materials in our journals and our textbooks on specifically how to increase student ethical awareness is extremely limited.

3. The need exists to develop integrated approaches for raising student ethical awareness in persuasion classes. One such approach is developed.[15]

I have no experimental evidence that what I have labeled an integrated approach to teaching ethics in the persuasion class is either integrated or effective. My experiential feeling is that it is both. At least, I now feel better about my approach to the course. I feel less worried about Everett Lee Hunts oft quoted comment that "the first per-

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[14]The vote was 21-3 that such a proposition had low truth probability.

[15]For such an approach outside of our discipline see Richard J. Margolis, "Steps Toward Ethical Maturity," Change Magazine (January 1977) 50-53.

suader was the devil, and there are many who feel there has always been and always will be something devilish about persuasion."[16] I feel more in tune with this meaningful advice of Robert L. Scott; "If we concern ourselves with building instruments without instructions regarding the dangers inherent in their use, we shall be liable, like the man who leaves a ladder leaning against his house, at least to the charge of providing an 'attractive nuisance.'"[17] I hope the ideas in this paper may lead to a dialogue that will reduce the number of attractive nuisances created by teachers of persuasion.

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[16]"Rhetoric as a Humane Study," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 41 (April 1955) 114.

[17]"Some Implications of Existentialism for Rhetoric," Central States Speech Journal, 15 (November 1964) 275.